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THE REGISTER

Farce

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By W. D. HOWELLS

BOSTON
JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY
1884

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University Press:
JOHN WILSON AND SON, CAMBRIDGE.

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1884

THE REGISTER.

Farce.

I.

MISS ETHEL REED AND MISS HENRIETTA SPAULDING.

IN an upper chamber of a boarding-house in Melanchthon Place, Boston, a mature, plain young lady, with every appearance of establishing herself in the room for the first time, moves about, bestowing little touches of decoration here and there, and talking with another young lady, whose voice comes through the open doorway of an inner room.

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Miss Ethel Reed, from within: "What in the world are you doing, Nettie?"

Miss Henrietta Spaulding: "Oh, sticking up a household god or two. What are you doing?"

Miss Reed: "Despairing."

Miss Spaulding: "Still?"

Miss Reed, tragically: "*Still!* How soon did you expect me to stop? I am here on the sofa, where I flung myself two hours ago, and I don't think I shall ever get up. There is no reason *why* I ever should."

Miss Spaulding, suggestively: "Dinner."

Miss Reed: "Oh, dinner! Dinner, to a broken heart!"

Miss Spaulding: "I don't believe your heart is broken."

Miss Reed: "But I tell you it is! I ought to know when my own heart is broken, I should hope. What makes you think it isn't?"

Miss Spaulding: "Oh, it's happened so often!"

Miss Reed: "But this is a real case. You ought to feel my forehead. It's as *hot!*"

Miss Spaulding: "You ought to get up and help me put this room to rights, and then you would feel better."

Miss Reed: "No; I should feel worse. The idea of household gods makes me sick. Sylvan deities are what *I* want; the great god Pan among the cat-tails and arrow-heads in the 'ma'sh' at Ponkwasset; the dryads of the birch woods — there are no oaks — the nymphs that

haunt the heights and hollows of the dear old mountain; the —"

Miss Spaulding: "Wha-a-at? I can't hear a word you say."

Miss Reed: "That's because you keep fussing about so. Why don't you be quiet, if you want to hear?" She lifts her voice to its highest pitch, with a pause for distinctness between the words: "I'm heart-broken for — Ponkwasset. The dryads — of the — birch woods. The nymphs — and the great — god — Pan — in the reeds — by the river. And all — that — sort of — thing!"

Miss Spaulding: "You know very well you're not."

Miss Reed: "I'm not? What's the reason I'm not? Then what am I heart-broken for?"

Miss Spaulding: "You're not heart-broken at all. You know very well that he'll call before we've been here twenty-four hours."

Miss Reed: "Who?"

Miss Spaulding: "The great god Pan."

Miss Reed: "Oh, how cruel you are, to mock me so! Come in here and sympathize a little! Do, Nettie."

Miss Spaulding: "No; you come out here and utilize a little. I'm acting for your best good, as they say at Ponkwasset."

Miss Reed: "When they want to be disagreeable!"

Miss Spaulding: "If this room isn't in order by the time he calls, you'll be everlastingly disgraced.

Miss Reed: "I'm that now. I can't be more so — there 's that comfort. What makes you think he 'll call?"

Miss Spaulding: "Because he 's a gentleman, and will want to apologize. He behaved very rudely to you."

Miss Reed: "No, Nettie; *I* behaved rudely to *him.* Yes! Besides, if he behaved rudely, he was no gentleman. It 's a contradiction in terms, don't you see? But I 'll tell you what I 'm going to do if he comes. I 'm going to show a proper spirit for once in my life. I 'm going to refuse to see him. *You 've* got to see him."

Miss Spaulding: "Nonsense!"

Miss Reed: "Why nonsense? Oh, why? Expound!"

Miss Spaulding: "Because he was n't

rude to me, and he does n't want to see me. Because I 'm plain and you 're pretty."

Miss Reed: "I 'm *not!* You know it perfectly well. I 'm hideous!"

Miss Spaulding: "Because I 'm poor, and you 're a person of independent property."

Miss Reed: "*Dependent* property, I should call it: just enough to be useless on! But that 's insulting to *him.* How can you say it 's because I have a little money?"

Miss Spaulding: "Well, then, I won't. I take it back. I 'll say it 's because you 're young, and I 'm old."

Miss Reed: "You 're *not* old. You 're as young as anybody, Nettie Spaulding. And you know I 'm not young; I 'm

twenty-seven, if I 'm a day. I 'm just dropping into the grave. But I can't argue with you, miles off so, any longer." Miss Reed appears at the open door, dragging languidly after her the shawl which she had evidently drawn round her on the sofa; her fair hair is a little disordered, and she presses it into shape with one hand as she comes forward; a lovely flush vies with a heavenly pallor in her cheeks; she looks a little pensive in the arching eyebrows, and a little humorous about the dimpled mouth. "Now I can prove that you are entirely wrong. Where were you? — This room *is* rather an improvement over the one we had last winter. There is more of a view" — she goes to the window — "of the houses across the Place; and I always think the

swell front gives a pretty shape to a room. I 'm sorry they 've stopped building them. Your piano goes very nicely into that little alcove. Yes, we 're quite palatial. And, on the whole, I 'm glad there 's no fire-place. It 's a pleasure at times; but for the most part it 's a vanity and a vexation, getting dust and ashes over everything. Yes; after all, give me the good old-fashioned, clean, convenient register! Ugh! My feet are like ice." She pulls an easy-chair up to the register in the corner of the room, and pushes open its valves with the toe of her slipper. As she settles herself luxuriously in the chair, and poises her feet daintily over the register: "Ah, this is something like! Henrietta Spaulding, ma'am! Did I ever tell you that you were the best friend I have in the world?"

Miss Spaulding, who continues her work of arranging the room: "Often."

Miss Reed: "Did you ever believe it?"

Miss Spaulding: "Never."

Miss Reed: "Why?"

Miss Spaulding, thoughtfully regarding a vase which she holds in her hand, after several times shifting it from a bracket to the corner of her piano and back: "I wish I could tell where you *do* look best!"

Miss Reed, leaning forward wistfully, with her hands clasped and resting on her knees: "I wish you would tell me *why* you don't believe you're the best friend I have in the world."

Miss Spaulding, finally placing the vase on the bracket: "Because you've said so too often."

Miss Reed: "Oh, that's no reason! I can prove to you that you are. Who else but you would have taken in a homeless and friendless creature like me, and let her stay bothering round in demoralizing idleness, while you were seriously teaching the young idea how to drub the piano?"

Miss Spaulding: "Anybody who wanted a room-mate as much as I did, and could have found one willing to pay more than her share of the lodging."

Miss Reed, thoughtfully: "Do you think so, Henrietta?"

Miss Spaulding: "I know so."

Miss Reed: "And you're not afraid that you wrong yourself?"

Miss Spaulding: "Not the least."

Miss Reed: "Well, be it so — as they

say in novels. I will not contradict you; I will not say you are my *best* friend; I will merely say that you are my *only* friend. Come here, Henrietta. Draw up your chair, and put your little hand in mine."

Miss Spaulding, with severe distrust: "What do you want, Ethel Reed?"

Miss Reed: "I want — I want — to talk it over with you."

Miss Spaulding, recoiling: "I knew it! Well, now, we've talked it over enough; we've talked it over till there's nothing left of it."

Miss Reed: "Oh, there's everything left! It remains in all its original enormity. Perhaps we shall get some new light upon it." She extends a pleading hand toward Miss Spaulding. "Come,

Henrietta, my only friend, shake! — as the 'good Indians' say. Let your Ethel pour her hackneyed sorrows into your bosom. (Such an uncomfortable image, it always seems, does n't it, pouring sorrows into bosoms!) Come!"

Miss Spaulding, decidedly: "No, I won't! And you need n't try wheedling any longer. I won't sympathize with you on that basis at all."

Miss Reed: "What shall I try, then, if you won't let me try wheedling?"

Miss Spaulding, going to the piano and opening it: "Try courage; try self-respect."

Miss Reed: "Oh, dear! when I have n't a morsel of either. Are you going to practise, you cruel maid?"

Miss Spaulding: "Of course I am.

It's half-past four, and if I don't do it now I sha'n't be prepared to-morrow for Miss Robins: she takes this piece."

Miss Reed: "Well, well, perhaps it's all for the best. If music be the food of — umph-umph! — you know what! — play on." They both laugh, and Miss Spaulding pushes back a little from the piano, and wheels toward her friend, letting one hand rest slightly on the keys.

Miss Spaulding: "Ethel Reed, you're the most ridiculous girl in the world."

Miss Reed: "Correct!"

Miss Spaulding: "And I don't believe you ever were in love, or ever will be."

Miss Reed: "Ah, there you wrong me, Henrietta! I have been, and I shall be — lots of times."

Miss Spaulding: "Well, what do you want to say now? You must hurry, for I can't lose any more time."

Miss Reed: "I will free my mind with neatness and dispatch. I simply wish to go over the whole affair, from Alfred to Omaha; and you've got to let me talk as much slang and nonsense as I want. And then I'll skip all the details I can. Will you?"

Miss Spaulding, with impatient patience: "Oh, I suppose so!"

Miss Reed: "That's very sweet of you, though you don't look it. Now, where was I? Oh, yes; do you think it was forth-putting at all, to ask him if he would give me the lessons?"

Miss Spaulding: "It depends upon why you asked him."

Miss Reed: "I asked him from — from — Let me see; I asked him because — from — Yes, I say it boldly; I asked him from an enthusiasm for art and a sincere wish to learn the use of oil, as he called it. Yes!"

Miss Spaulding: "Are you sure?"

Miss Reed: "Sure? Well, we will say that I am, for the sake of argument. And, having secured this basis, the question is whether I was n't bound to offer him pay at the end, and whether he was n't wrong to take my doing so in dudgeon."

Miss Spaulding: "Yes, I think he was wrong. And the terms of his refusal were very ungentlemanly. He ought to apologize most amply and humbly." At a certain expression in Miss Reed's face,

she adds, with severity: "Unless you're keeping back the main point. You usually do. Are you?"

Miss Reed: "No, no. I've told you everything — everything!"

Miss Spaulding: "Then I say, as I said from the beginning, that he behaved very badly. It was very awkward and very painful, but you've really nothing to blame yourself for."

Miss Reed, ruefully: "No-o-o!"

Miss Spaulding: "What do you mean by that sort of 'No'?"

Miss Reed: "Nothing."

Miss Spaulding, sternly: "Yes, you do, Ethel."

Miss Reed: "I don't, really. What makes you think I do?"

Miss Spaulding: "It sounded very dishonest." =

Miss Reed: "Did it? I didn't mean it to." Her friend breaks down with a laugh, while Miss Reed preserves a demure countenance.

Miss Spaulding: "What *are* you keeping back?"

Miss Reed: "Nothing at all — less than nothing! I never thought it was worth mentioning."

Miss Spaulding: "Are you telling me the truth?"

Miss Reed: "I'm telling you the truth and something more. You can't ask better than that, can you?"

Miss Spaulding, turning to her music again: "Certainly not."

Miss Reed, in a pathetic wail: "Oh, Henrietta, do you abandon me thus? Well, I will tell you, heartless girl! I've

only kept it back till now because it was so extremely mortifying to my pride as an artist — as a student of oil. Will you hear me?"

Miss Spaulding, beginning to play: "No."

Miss Reed, with burlesque wildness: "You shall!" Miss S. involuntarily desists. "There was a moment — a fatal moment — when he said he thought he ought to tell me that if I found oil amusing I could go on; but that he did n't believe I should ever learn to use it, and he could n't let me take lessons from him with the expectation that I should. There!"

Miss Spaulding, with awful reproach: "And you call that less than nothing? I 've almost a mind never to speak to you

again, Ethel. How *could* you deceive me so?"

Miss Reed: "Was it really deceiving? *I* should n't call it so. And I needed your sympathy so much, and I knew I should n't get it unless you thought I was altogether in the right."

Miss Spaulding: "You were altogether in the *wrong!* And it's *you* that ought to apologize to *him* — on your bended knees. How *could* you offer him money after that? I wonder at you, Ethel!"

Miss Reed: "Why — don't you see, Nettie? — I did keep on taking the lessons of him. I did find oil amusing — or the oilist — and I kept on. Of course I had to, off there in a farm-house full of lady boarders, and he the only gentleman short of Crawford's. Strike, but hear

me, Henrietta Spaulding! What was I to do about the half-dozen lessons I had taken before he told me I should never learn to use oil? Was I to offer to pay him for these, and not for the rest; or was I to treat the whole series as gratuitous? I used to lie awake thinking about it. I've got some little tact, but I could n't find any way out of the trouble. It was a box — yes, a box of the deepest dye! And the whole affair having got to be — something else, don't you know? — made it all the worse. And if he 'd only — only.— But he did n't. Not a syllable, not a breath! And there I was. I *had* to offer him the money. And it 's almost killed me — the way he took my offering it, and now the way you take it! And it 's all of a piece." Miss Reed

suddenly snatches her handkerchief from her pocket and buries her face in it. — "Oh dear — oh dear! Oh! — hu, hu, hu!"

Miss Spaulding, relenting: "It was awkward."

Miss Reed: "Awkward! You seem to think that because I carry things off lightly I have no feeling."

Miss Spaulding: "You know I don't think that, Ethel."

Miss Reed, pursuing her advantage: "I don't know it from you, Nettie. I've tried and *tried* to pass it off as a joke, and to treat it as something funny; but I can tell you it's no joke at all."

Miss Spaulding, sympathetically: "I see, dear."

Miss Reed: "It's not that I care for him —"

Miss Spaulding: "Why, of course."

Miss Reed: "For I don't, in the least. He is horrid every way: blunt, and rude, and horrid. I never cared for him. But I care for myself! He has put me in the position of having done an unkind thing — an unladylike thing — when I was only doing what I had to do. Why need he have taken it the way he did? Why could n't he have said politely that he could n't accept the money because he had n't earned it? Even *that* would have been mortifying enough. But he must go and be so violent, and rush off, and — Oh, I never could have treated anybody so!"

Miss Spaulding: "Not unless you were very fond of them."

Miss Reed: "What?"

Miss Spaulding: "Not unless you were very fond of them."

Miss Reed, putting away her handkerchief: "Oh, nonsense, Nettie! He never cared anything for me, or he could n't have acted so. But no matter for that. He has fixed everything so that it can never be got straight — never in the world. It will just have to remain a hideous mass of — of — *I* don't know what; and I have simply got to go on withering with despair at the point where I left off. But I don't care! That's one comfort."

Miss Spaulding: "I don't believe he'll let you wither long, Ethel."

Miss Reed: "He's let me wither for twenty-four hours already! But it's nothing to me, now, *how* long he lets me

wither. I 'm perfectly satisfied to have the affair remain as it is. I am in the right, and if he comes I shall refuse to see him."

Miss Spaulding: "Oh no, you won't, Ethel!"

Miss Reed: "Yes, I shall. I shall receive him very coldly. I won't listen to any excuse from him."

Miss Spaulding: "Oh yes, you will, Ethel!"

Miss Reed: "No, I shall not. If he wishes me to listen to him he must begin by humbling himself in the dust — yes, the dust, Nettie! I won't take anything short of it. I insist that he shall realize that I have suffered."

Miss Spaulding: "Perhaps he has suffered too!"

Miss Reed: "Oh, *he* suffered!"

Miss Spaulding: "You know that he was perfectly devoted to you."

Miss Reed: "He never said so."

Miss Spaulding: "Perhaps he did n't dare."

Miss Reed: "He dared to be very insolent to me."

Miss Spaulding: "And you know you liked him very much."

Miss Reed: "I won't let you say that, Nettie Spaulding. I *did n't* like him. I respected and admired him; but I did n't *like* him. He will never come near me; but if he does he has got to begin by — by — Let me see, what shall I make him begin by doing?" She casts up her eyes for inspiration while she leans forward over the register. "Yes, I will! He has got to begin by taking that money!"

Miss Spaulding: "Ethel, you *wouldn't* put that affront upon a sensitive and high-spirited man!"

Miss Reed: "Would n't I? You wait and *see*, Miss Spaulding! He shall take the money, and he shall sign a receipt for it. I 'll draw up the receipt now, so as to have it ready, and I shall ask him to sign it the moment he enters this door — the very instant!" She takes a portfolio from the table near her, without rising, and writes: "'Received from Miss Ethel Reed one hundred and twenty-five dollars, in full, for twenty-five lessons in oil-painting.' There — when Mr. Oliver Ransom has signed this little document he may begin to talk; not before!" She leans back in her chair with an air of pitiless determination.

Miss Spaulding: "But, Ethel, you don't mean to make him take money for the lessons he gave you after he told you you could n't learn anything?"

Miss Reed, after a moment's pause: "Yes, I do. This is to punish him. I don't wish for justice now; I wish for vengeance! At first I would have compromised on the six lessons, or on none at all, if he had behaved nicely; but after what's happened I shall insist upon paying him for every lesson, so as to make him feel that the whole thing, from first to last, was a purely business transaction on my part. Yes, a *purely* — BUSINESS — TRANSACTION!"

Miss Spaulding, turning to her music: "Then I've got nothing more to say to you, Ethel Reed."

Miss Reed: "I don't say but what, after he 's taken the money and signed the receipt, I 'll listen to anything else he 's got to say, very willingly." Miss Spaulding makes no answer, but begins to play with a scientific absorption, feeling her way fitfully through the new piece, while Miss Reed, seated by the register, trifles with the book she has taken from the table.

II.

MR. GRINNIDGE AND MR. RANSOM; THEN MISS SPAULDING AND MISS REED.

The interior of the room of Miss Spaulding and Miss Reed remains in view, while the scene discloses, on the other side of the partition wall in the same house, the bachelor apartment of Mr. Samuel Grinnidge. Mr. Grinnidge, in his dressing gown and slippers, with his pipe in his mouth, has the effect of having just come in; his friend Mr. Oliver Ransom stands at the window, staring out into the November weather.

Grinnidge: "How long have you been waiting here?"

Ransom: "Ten minutes — ten years. How should I know?"

Grinnidge: "Well, I don't know who else should. Get back to-day?"

Ransom: "Last night."

Grinnidge: "Well, take off your coat, and pull up to the register and warm your poor feet." He puts his hand out over the register. "Confound it! somebody's got the register open in the next room! You see, one pipe comes up from the furnace and branches into a V just under the floor, and professes to heat both rooms. But it don't. There was a fellow in there last winter who used to get all my heat. Used to go out and leave his register open, and I'd come in here just before dinner and find this place as cold as a barn. We had a running

fight of it all winter. The man who got his register open first in the morning got all the heat for the day, for it never turned the other way when it started in one direction. Used to almost suffocate — warm, muggy days — maintaining my rights. Some piano-pounder in there this winter, it seems. Hear? And she has n't lost any time in learning the trick of the register. What kept you so late in the country?"

Ransom, after an absent-minded pause: "Grinnidge, I wish you would give me some advice."

Grinnidge: "You can have all you want of it at the market price."

Ransom: "I don't mean your legal advice."

Grinnidge: "I'm sorry. What have you been doing?"

Ransom: "I've been making an ass of myself."

Grinnidge: "Was n't that rather superfluous?"

Ransom: "If you please, yes. But now, if you're capable of listening to me without any further display of your cross-examination wit, I should like to tell you how it happened."

Grinnidge: "I will do my best to veil my brilliancy. Go on."

Ransom: "I went up to Ponkwasset early in September for the foliage."

Grinnidge: "And staid till late in October. There must have been a reason for that. What was *her* name? Foliage?"

Ransom, coming up the corner of the chimney-piece, near which his friend sits,

and talking to him directly over the register: "I think you'll have to get along without the name for the present. I'll tell you by-and-by." As Mr. Ransom pronounces these words, Miss Reed, on her side of the partition, lifts her head with a startled air, and, after a moment of vague circumspection, listens keenly. "But she *was* beautiful. She was a blonde, and she had the loveliest eyes — eyes, you know, that could be funny or tender, just as she chose — the kind of eyes I always liked." Miss Reed leans forward over the register. "She had one of those faces that always leave you in doubt whether they're laughing at you, and so keep you in wholesome subjection; but you feel certain that they're *good*, and that if they did hurt you by laughing at

you, they 'd look sorry for you afterward. When she walked you saw what an exquisite creature she was. It always made me mad to think I could n't *paint* her walk."

Grinnidge: "I suppose you saw a good deal of her walk."

Ransom: "Yes; we were off in the woods and fields half the time together." He takes a turn toward the window.

Miss Reed, suddenly shutting the register on her side: "Oh!"

Miss Spaulding, looking up from her music: "What is it, Ethel?"

Miss Reed: "Nothing, nothing; I — I — thought it was getting too warm. Go on, dear; don't let me interrupt you." After a moment of heroic self-denial she softly presses the register open with her foot.

Ransom, coming back to the register: "It all began in that way. I had the good fortune one day to rescue her from a — cow."

Miss Reed: "Oh, for shame!"

Miss Spaulding, desisting from her piano: "What *is* the matter?"

Miss Reed, clapping the register to: "This ridiculous book! But don't — don't mind me, Nettie." Breathlessly: "Go — go — on!" Miss Spaulding resumes, and again Miss Reed softly presses the register open.

Ransom, after a pause: "The cow was grazing, and had no more thought of hooking Miss —"

Miss Reed: "Oh, I didn't suppose he *would!* — Go on, Nettie, go on! The hero — *such* a goose!"

Ransom: "I drove her away with my camp-stool, and Miss — the young lady — was as grateful as if I had rescued her from a menagerie of wild animals. I walked home with her to the farm-house, and the trouble began at once." Pantomime of indignant protest and burlesque menace on the part of Miss Reed. "There was n't another well woman in the house, except her friend Miss Spaulding, who was rather old and rather plain." He takes another turn to the window.

Miss Reed: "Oh!" She shuts the register, but instantly opens it again. "Louder, Nettie."

Miss Spaulding, in astonishment: "What?"

Miss Reed: "Did I speak? I did n't know it. I —"

Miss Spaulding, desisting from practice: "What is that strange, hollow, rumbling, mumbling kind of noise?"

Miss Reed, softly closing the register with her foot: "I don't hear any strange, hollow, rumbling, mumbling kind of noise. Do you hear it *now*?"

Miss Spaulding: "No. It was the Brighton whistle, probably."

Miss Reed: "Oh, very likely." As Miss Spaulding turns again to her practice Miss Reed re-opens the register and listens again. A little interval of silence ensues, while Ransom lights a cigarette.

Grinnidge: "So you sought opportunities of rescuing her from other cows?"

Ransom, returning: "That was n't necessary. The young lady was so impressed by my behavior that she asked

if I would give her some lessons in the use of oil."

Grinnidge: "She thought if she knew how to paint pictures like yours she would n't need any one to drive the cows away."

Ransom: "Don't be farcical, Grinnidge. That sort of thing will do with some victim on the witness stand who can't help himself. Of course I said I would, and we were off half the time together, painting the loveliest and loneliest bits around Ponkwasset. It all went on very well, till one day I felt bound in conscience to tell her that I did n't think she would ever learn to paint, and that if she was serious about it she 'd better drop it at once, for she was wasting her time."

Grinnidge, getting up to fill his pipe: "That was a pleasant thing to do."

Ransom: "I told her that if it amused her, to keep on; I would be only too glad to give her all the hints I could, but that I ought n't to encourage her. She seemed a good deal hurt. I fancied at the time that she thought I was tired of having her with me so much."

Miss Reed: "Oh, *did* you, indeed!" To Miss Spaulding, who bends an astonished glance upon her from the piano: "The man in this book is the most *conceited* creature, Nettie. Play chords — something very subdued — ah!"

Miss Spaulding: "What *are* you talking about, Ethel?"

Ransom: "That was at night; but the next day she came up smiling, and said

that if I did n't mind she would keep on — for amusement; she was n't a bit discouraged."

Miss Reed: "Oh! — Go on, Nettie; don't let my outbursts interrupt you."

Ransom: "I used to fancy sometimes that she *was* a little sweet on me."

Miss Reed: "You wretch! — Oh, scales, Nettie! Play scales!"

Miss Spaulding: "Ethel Reed, are you crazy?"

Ransom, after a thoughtful moment: "Well, so it went on for the next seven or eight weeks. When we were n't sketching in the meadows, or on the mountainside, or in the old punt on the pond, we were walking up and down the farmhouse piazza together. She used to read to me when I was at work. She had a heavenly voice, Grinnidge."

Miss Reed: "Oh, you silly, silly thing! — Really this book makes me sick, Nettie."

Ransom: "Well, the long and the short of it was, I was hit — *hard*, and I lost all courage. You know how I am, Grinnidge."

Miss Reed, softly: "Oh, poor fellow!"

Ransom: "So I let the time go by, and at the end I had n't said anything."

Miss Reed: "No, sir! You *had n't!*" Miss Spaulding gradually ceases to play, and fixes her attention wholly upon Miss Reed, who bends forward over the register with an intensely excited face.

Ransom: "Then something happened that made me glad, for twenty-four hours at least, that I had n't spoken. She sent me the money for twenty-five lessons.

Imagine how I felt, Grinnidge! What could I suppose but that she had been quietly biding her time, and storing up her resentment for my having told her she could n't learn to paint, till she could pay me back with interest in one supreme insult?"

Miss Reed, in a low voice: "Oh, how could you think such a cruel, vulgar thing?" Miss Spaulding leaves the piano, and softly approaches her, where she has sunk on her knees beside the register.

Ransom: "It was tantamount to telling me that she had been amusing herself with me instead of my lessons. It remanded our whole association, which I had got to thinking so romantic, to the relation of teacher and pupil. It was a snub — a heartless, killing snub; and I

could n't see it in any other light." Ransom walks away to the window, and looks out.

Miss Reed, flinging herself backward from the register, and hiding her face in her hands: "Oh, it was n't! it was n't! it was n't! *How* could you think so?"

Miss Spaulding, rushing forward, and catching her friend in her arms: "What is the matter with you, Ethel Reed? What are you doing here, over the register? Are you trying to suffocate yourself? Have you taken leave of your senses?"

Grinnidge: "Our fair friend on the other side of the wall seems to be on the rampage."

Miss Spaulding, shutting the register with a violent clash: "Ugh! how hot it is here!"

Grinnidge: "Does n't like your conversation, apparently."

Miss Reed, frantically pressing forward to open the register: "Oh, don't shut it, Nettie dear! If you do I shall die! Do-o-n't shut the register!"

Miss Spaulding: "Don't shut it? Why, we 've got all the heat of the furnace in the room now. Surely you don't want any more?"

Miss Reed: "No, no; not any more. But — but — Oh dear! what shall I do?" She still struggles in the embrace of her friend.

Grinnidge, remaining quietly at the register, while Ransom walks away to the window: "Well, what did you do?"

Miss Reed: "There, there! They 're commencing again? *Do* open it, Nettie.

I *will* have it open!" She wrenches herself free, and dashes the register open.

Grinnidge: "Ah, she's opened it again."

Miss Reed, in a stage-whisper: "That's the other one!"

Ransom, from the window: "Do? I'll tell you what I did."

Miss Reed: "That's Ol—Mr. Ransom. And, oh, I can't make out what he's saying! He must have gone away to the other side of the room — and it's at the most important point!"

Miss Spaulding, in an awful undertone: "Was *that* the hollow rumbling I heard? And have you been listening at the register to what they've been saying? Oh, *Ethel!*"

Miss Reed: "I haven't been listening, exactly."

Miss Spaulding: "You have! You have been eavesdropping!"

Miss Reed: "Eavesdropping is listening through a key-hole, or around a corner. This is very different. Besides, it's Oliver, and he's been talking about *me*. Hark!" She clutches her friend's hand, and where they have crouched upon the floor together, pulls her forward to the register. "Oh dear, how hot it is! I wish they would cut off the heat down below."

Grinnidge, smoking peacefully through the silence which his friend has absent-mindedly let follow upon his last words: "Well, you seem disposed to take your time about it."

Ransom: "About what? Oh, yes! Well —"

Miss Reed: "'Sh! Listen."

Miss Spaulding: "I won't listen. It's shameful; it's wicked! I don't see how you can do it, Ethel!" She remains, however, kneeling near the register, and she involuntarily inclines a little more toward it.

Ransom: "—it is n't a thing that I care to shout from the house-tops." He returns from the window to the chimney-piece. "I wrote the rudest kind of note, and sent back her letter and her money in it. She had said that she hoped our acquaintance was not to end with the summer, but that we might sometimes meet in Boston; and I answered that our acquaintance had ended already, and that I should be sorry to meet her anywhere again."

Grinnidge: "Well, if you wanted to make an ass of yourself, you did it pretty completely."

Miss Reed, whispering: "How witty he is! Those men are always so humorous with each other."

Ransom: "Yes; I did n't do it by halves."

Miss Reed, whispering: "Oh, *that's* funny, too!"

Grinnidge: "It did n't occur to you that she might feel bound to pay you for the first half-dozen, and was embarrassed how to offer to pay for them alone?"

Miss Reed: "How he *does* go to the heart of the matter!" She presses Miss Spaulding's hand in an ecstasy of approval.

Ransom: "Yes, it did — afterward."

Miss Reed, in a tender murmur: "Oh, *poor* Oliver!"

Ransom: "And it occurred to me that she was perfectly right in the whole affair."

Miss Reed: "Oh, how generous! how noble!"

Ransom: "I had had a thousand opportunities, and I had n't been man enough to tell her that I was in love with her."

Miss Reed: "How can he say it right out so bluntly? But if it 's true —"

Ransom: "I *could n't* speak. I was afraid of putting an end to the affair — of frightening her — disgusting her."

Miss Reed: "Oh, how little they know us, Nettie!"

Ransom: "She seemed so much above

me in every way — so sensitive, so refined, so gentle, so good, so angelic!"

Miss Reed: "There! *Now* do you call it eavesdropping? If listeners never hear any good of themselves, what do you say to that? It proves that I have n't been listening."

Miss Spaulding: "'Sh! They 're saying something else."

Ransom: "But all that 's neither here nor there. I can see now that under the circumstances she could n't as a lady have acted otherwise than she did. She was forced to treat our whole acquaintance as a business matter, and I had forced her to do it."

Miss Reed: "You *had*, you poor thing!"

Grinnidge: "Well, what do you intend to do about it?"

Ransom: "Well —"

Miss Reed: "'Sh!"

Miss Spaulding: "'Sh!"

Ransom: "— that's what I want to submit to you, Grinnidge. I must see her."

Grinnidge: "Yes. I'm glad *I* must n't."

Miss Reed, stifling a laugh on Miss Spaulding's shoulder: "They 're actually *afraid* of us, Nettie!"

Ransom: "See her, and go down in the dust."

Miss Reed: "My very words!"

Ransom: "I have been trying to think what was the very humblest pie I could eat, by way of penance; and it appears to me that I had better begin by saying that I have come to ask her for the money I refused."

Miss Reed, enraptured: "Oh! does n't it seem just like — like — inspiration, Nettie?"

Miss Spaulding: "'Sh! Be quiet, do! You 'll frighten them away!"

Grinnidge: "And then what?"

Ransom: "What then? I do n't know what then. But it appears to me that, as a gentleman, I 've got nothing to do with the result. All that I've got to do is to submit to my fate, whatever it is."

Miss Reed, breathlessly: "What princely courage! What delicate magnanimity! Oh, he need n't have the *least* fear! If I could only tell him that!"

Grinnidge, after an interval of meditative smoking: "Yes, I guess that 's the best thing you can do. It will strike her

fancy, if she 's an imaginative girl, and she 'll think you a fine fellow."

Miss Reed: "Oh, the horrid thing!"

Grinnidge: "If you humble yourself to a woman at all, do it thoroughly. If you go half-way down she 'll be tempted to push you the rest of the way. If you flatten out at her feet to begin with, ten to one but she will pick you up."

Ransom: "Yes, that was my idea."

Miss Reed: "Oh, was it, indeed! Well!"

Ransom: "But I 've nothing to do with her picking me up or pushing me down. All that I 've got to do is to go and surrender myself."

Grinnidge: "Yes. Well; I guess you can't go too soon. I like your company; but I advise you as a friend not to lose time. Where does she live?"

Ransom: "That 's the remarkable part of it: she lives in this house."

Miss Reed and Miss Spaulding, in subdued chorus: "Oh!"

Grinnidge, taking his pipe out of his mouth in astonishment: "No!"

Ransom: "I just came in here to give my good resolutions a rest while I was screwing my courage up to ask for her."

Miss Reed: "Don't you think he 's *very* humorous? Give his good resolutions a rest! That 's the way he *always* talks."

Miss Spaulding: "'Sh!"

Grinnidge: "You said you came for my advice."

Ransom: "So I did. But I did n't promise to act upon it. Well!" He goes toward the door.

Grinnidge, without troubling himself to rise: "Well, good luck to you!"

Miss Reed: "*How* droll they are with each other! Don't you *like* to hear them talk? Oh, I could listen all day."

Grinnidge, calling after Ransom: "You have n't told me your duck's name."

Miss Reed: "Is *that* what they call us? Duck! Do you think it 's very respectful, Nettie? I don't believe I like it. Or, yes, why not? It 's no harm — if I *am* his duck!"

Ransom, coming back: "Well, I don't propose to go shouting it round. Her name is Miss Reed — Ethel Reed."

Miss Reed: "How *can* he?"

Grinnidge: "Slender, willowy party, with a lot of blonde hair that looks as if it might be indigenous? Rather pensive-looking?"

Miss Reed: "Indigenous! I should hope so!"

Ransom: "Yes. But she is n't pensive. She 's awfully deep. It makes me shudder to think how deep that girl is. And when I think of my courage in daring to be in love with her — a stupid, straightforward idiot like me — I begin to respect myself in spite of being such an ass. Well, I 'm off. If I stay any longer I shall never go." He closes the door after him, and Miss Reed instantly springs to her feet.

Miss Reed: "Now he 'll have to go down to the parlor and send up his name, and that just gives me time to do the necessary prinking. You stay here and receive him, Nettie."

Miss Spaulding: "Never! After

what's happened I can never look him in the face again. Oh, how low, and mean, and guilty I feel!"

Miss Reed, with surprise: "Why, how droll! Now *I* don't feel the least so."

Miss Spaulding: "Oh, it's very different with *you*. *You're* in love with him."

Miss Reed: "For shame, Nettie! I'm *not* in love with him."

Miss Spaulding: "And you can explain and justify it. But I never can justify it to myself, much less to him. Let me go, Ethel! I shall tell Mrs. McKnight that we must change this room instantly. And just after I'd got it so nearly in order! Go down and receive him in the parlor, Ethel. I *can't* see him."

Miss Reed: "Receive him in the par-

lor! Why, Nettie dear, you're crazy! I'm going to *accept* him; and how can I accept him — with all the consequences — in a public parlor? No, indeed! If you won't meet him here for a moment, just to oblige me, you can go into the other room. Or, no — you'd be listening to every word through the key-hole, you're so demoralized!"

Miss Spaulding: "Yes, yes, I deserve your contempt, Ethel."

Miss Reed, laughing: "You will have to go out for a walk, you poor thing; and I'm not going to have you coming back in five or ten minutes. You have got to stay out a good hour."

Miss Spaulding, running to get her things from the next room: "Oh, I'll stay out till midnight!"

Miss Reed, responding to a tap at the door: "Ye-e-s! Come in! — You 're caught, Nettie."

A maid-servant, appearing with a card: "This gentleman is asking for you in the parlor, Miss Reed."

Miss Reed: "Oh! Ask him to come up here, please. — Nettie! Nettie!" She calls to her friend in the next room. "He 's coming right up, and if you don't run you 're trapped."

Miss Spaulding, re-appearing, cloaked and bonneted: "I don't blame *you*, Ethel, comparatively speaking. You can say that everything is fair in love. He will like it, and laugh at it in you, because he 'll like everything you 've done. Besides, you 've no principles, and I *have*."

Miss Reed: "Oh, I've lots of principles, Nettie, but I've no practice!"

Miss Spaulding: "No matter. There's no excuse for me. I listened simply because I was a woman, and could n't help it; and, oh, what will he think of me?"

Miss Reed: "I won't give you away; if you really feel so badly —"

Miss Spaulding: "Oh, *do* you think you can keep from telling him, Ethel dear? Try! And I will be your slave forever!" Steps are heard on the stairs outside. "Oh, there he comes!" She dashes out of the door and closes it after her, a moment before the maid-servant, followed by Mr. Ransom, taps at it.

III.

MISS REED AND MR. RANSOM; THEN MR. GRINNIDGE.

Miss Reed opens the door and receives Mr. Ransom with well-affected surprise and state, suffering him to stand awkwardly on the threshold for a moment.

She, coldly: "Oh! Mr. Ransom!"

He, abruptly: "I've come—"

She: "Won't you come in?"

He, advancing a few paces into the room: "I've come—"

She, indicating a chair: "Will you sit down?"

He: "I must stand for the present.

I've come to ask you for that money, Miss Reed, which I refused yesterday, in terms that I blush to think of. I was altogether and wholly in the wrong, and I'm ready to offer any imaginable apology or reparation. I'm ready to take the money and to sign a receipt, and then to be dismissed with whatever ignominy you please. I deserve anything — everything!"

She: "The money? Excuse me; I don't know — I'm afraid that I'm not prepared to pay you the whole sum today."

He, hastily: "Oh, no matter! no matter! I don't care for the money now. I merely wished to — to assure you that I thought you were perfectly right in offering it, and to — to — "

She: "What?"

He: "Nothing. That is — ah — ah —"

She: "It 's extremely embarrassing to have people refuse their money when it 's offered them, and then come the next day for it, when perhaps it is n't so convenient to pay it — *very* embarrassing."

He, hotly: "But I tell you I don't want the *money!* I never wanted it, and would n't take it on any account."

She: "Oh! I thought you said you came to get it?"

He: "I said — I did n't say — I meant — that is — ah — I —" He stops, open-mouthed.

She, quietly: "I could give you part of the money now."

He: "Oh, whatever you like; it 's indifferent —"

She: "Please sit down while I write a

receipt." She places herself deliberately at the table, and opens her portfolio. "I will pay you now, Mr. Ransom, for the first six lessons you gave me — the ones before you told me that I could never learn to do anything."

He, sinking mechanically into the chair she indicates: "Oh, just as you like!" He looks up at the ceiling in hopeless bewilderment, while she writes.

She, blotting the paper: "There! And now let me offer you a little piece of advice, Mr. Ransom, which may be useful to you in taking pupils hereafter."

He, bursting out: "I never take pupils!"

She: "Never take pupils! I don't understand. You took *me*."

He, confusedly: "I took you — yes.

You seemed to wish — you seemed — the case was peculiar — peculiar circumstances."

She, with severity: "May I ask *why* the circumstances were peculiar? I saw nothing peculiar about the circumstances. It seemed to me it was a very simple matter. I told you that I had always had a great curiosity to see whether I could use oil paints, and I asked you a very plain question, whether you would let me study with you. Did n't I?"

He: "Yes."

She: "Was there anything wrong — anything queer about my asking you?"

He: "No, no! Not at all — not in the least."

She: "Did n't you wish me to take the lessons of you? If you did n't, it was n't kind of you to let me."

He: "Oh, I was perfectly willing — very glad indeed, very much so — certainly!"

She: "If it was n't your *custom* to take pupils, you ought to have told me, and I would n't have forced myself upon you."

He, desperately: "It was n't forcing yourself upon me. The Lord knows how humbly grateful I was. It was like a hope of heaven!"

She: "Really, Mr. Ransom, this is very strange talk. What am I to understand by it? *Why* should you be grateful to teach me! Why should giving me lessons be like a hope of heaven?"

He: "Oh, I will tell you!"

She: "Well?"

He, after a moment of agony: "Because to be with you —"

She: "Yes?"

He: "Because I wished to be with you. Because — those days in the woods, when you read, and I —"

She: "Painted on my pictures —"

He: "Were the happiest of my life. Because — I loved you!"

She: "Mr. Ransom!"

He: "Yes, I must tell you so. I loved you; I love you still. I shall always love you, no matter what —"

She: "You forget yourself, Mr. Ransom. Has there been anything in my manner — conduct — to justify you in using such language to me?"

He: "No — no —"

She: "Did you suppose that because I first took lessons of you from — from — an enthusiasm for art, and then con-

tinued them for — for — amusement, that I wished you to make love to me?"

He: "No, I never supposed such a thing. I'm incapable of it. I beseech you to believe that no one could have more respect — reverence —" He twirls his hat between his hands, and casts an imploring glance at her.

She: "Oh, respect — reverence! I know what they mean in the mouths of men. If you respected, if you reverenced me, could you dare to tell me, after my unguarded trust of you during the past months, that you had been all the time secretly in love with me?"

He, plucking up a little courage: "I don't see that the three things are incompatible."

She: "Oh, then you acknowledge that

you did presume upon something you thought you saw in me to tell me that you loved me, and that you were in love with me all the time?"

He, contritely: "I have no right to suppose that you encouraged me; and yet — I can't deny it now — I was in love with you all the time."

She: "And you never said a word to let me believe that you had any such feeling toward me!"

He: "I — I —"

She: "You would have parted from me without a syllable to suggest it — perhaps parted from me forever?" After a pause of silent humiliation for him: "Do you call that brave or generous? Do you call it manly — supposing, as you hoped, that *I* had any such feeling?"

He: "No; it was cowardly, it was mean, it was unmanly. I see it now, but I will spend my life in repairing the wrong if you will only let me." He impetuously advances some paces toward her, and then stops, arrested by her irresponsive attitude.

She, with a light sigh, and looking down at the paper, which she has continued to hold between her hands: "There was a time — a moment — when I might have answered as you wish."

He: "Oh! then there will be again. If you have changed once, you may change once more. Let me hope that some time — any time, dearest —"

She, quenching him with a look: "Mr. Ransom, I shall *never* change toward you! You confess that you had

your opportunity, and that you despised it."

He: "Oh! *not* despised!"

She: "Neglected it."

He: "Not wilfully — no. I confess that I was stupidly, vilely, pusillan — pusillan — illani —"

She: "'Mously —"

He: "Thanks — 'mously unworthy of it; but I did n't despise it; I did n't neglect it; and if you will only let me show by a lifetime of devotion how dearly and truly I have loved you from the first moment I drove that cow away —"

She: "Mr. Ransom, I have told you that I should never change toward you. That cow was nothing when weighed in the balance against your being willing to leave a poor girl, whom you supposed

interested in you, and to whom you had paid the most marked attention, without a word to show her that you cared for her. What is a cow, or a whole herd of cows, as compared with obliging a young lady to offer you money that you had n't earned, and then savagely flinging it back in her face? A yoke of oxen would be nothing — or a mad bull."

He: "Oh, I acknowledge it! I confess it."

She: "And you own that I am right in refusing to listen to you now?"

He, desolately: "Yes, yes."

She: "It seems that you gave me lessons in order to be with me, and if possible to interest me in you; and then you were going away without a word."

He, with a groan: "It was only because I was afraid to speak."

She: "Oh, is *that* any excuse?"

He: "No; none."

She: "A man ought always to have courage." After a pause, in which he stands before her with bowed head: "Then there is nothing for me but to give you this money."

He, with sudden energy: "This is too much! I—"

She, offering him the bank-notes: "No; it is the exact sum. I counted it very carefully."

He: "I won't take it; I can't! I'll never take it!"

She, standing with the money in her outstretched hand: "I have your word as a gentleman that you will take it."

He, gasping: "Oh, well — I will take it — I will — " He clutches the money, and rushes toward the door. "Good-evening; ah — good-by — "

She, calling after him: "The receipt, Mr. Ransom! Please sign this receipt!" She waves the paper in the air.

He: "Oh, yes, certainly! Where is it — what — which — " He rushes back to her, and seizing the receipt, feels blindly about for the pen and ink. "Where shall I sign?"

She: "Read it first."

He: "Oh, it 's all — all right — "

She: "I insist upon your reading it. It 's a business transaction. Read it aloud."

He, desperately: "Well, well!" He reads. "'*Received from Miss Ethel Reed*

in full, for twenty-five lessons in oil-painting, one hundred and twenty-five dollars, and her hand, heart, and dearest love forever.'" He looks up at her. "Ethel!"

She, smiling: "Sign it, sign it!"

He, catching her in his arms and kissing her: "Oh yes — *here!*"

She, pulling a little away from him, and laughing: "Oh, oh! I only wanted *one* signature! Twenty autographs are too many, unless you 'll let me trade them off, as the collectors do."

He: "No; keep them all! I could n't think of letting any one else have them. One more!"

She: "No; it's quite enough!" She frees herself, and retires beyond the table. "This unexpected affection —"

He: "*Is* it unexpected — seriously?"

She: "What do you mean?"

He: "Oh, nothing!"

She: "Yes, tell me!"

He: "I hoped — I thought — perhaps — that you might have been prepared for some such demonstration on my part."

She: "And why did you think — hope — perhaps — *that*, Mr. Ransom, may I ask?"

He: "If I had n't, how should I have dared to speak?"

She: "Dared? You were obliged to speak! Well, since it 's all over, I don't mind saying that I *did* have some slight apprehensions that something in the way of a declaration might be extorted from you."

He: "Extorted? Oh!" He makes an impassioned rush toward her.

She, keeping the table between them: "No, no."

He: "Oh, I merely wished to ask why you chose to make me suffer so, after I had come to the point."

She: "Ask it across the table, then." After a moment of reflection. "I made you suffer — I made you suffer — so that you might have a realizing sense of what you had made *me* suffer."

He, enraptured by this confession: "Oh, you angel!"

She, with tender magnanimity: "No; only a woman — a poor, trusting, foolish woman!" She permits him to surround the table, with imaginable results. Then, with her head on his shoulder. "You'll *never* let me regret it, will you, darling? You'll never oblige me to punish you

again, dearest, will you? Oh, it hurt *me* far worse to *see* your pain than it did you to — to — feel it!" On the other side of the partition, Mr. Grinnidge's pipe falls from his lips, parted in slumber, and shivers to atoms on the register. "Oh!" She flies at the register with a shriek of dismay, and is about to close it. "That wretch has been listening, and has heard every word!"

He, preventing her: "What wretch? Where?"

She: "Don't you hear him, mumbling and grumbling there?"

Grinnidge: "Well, I swear! Cash value of twenty-five dollars, and untold toil in coloring it!"

Ransom, listening with an air of mystification: "Who 's that?"

She: "Gummidge, Grimmidge — whatever you called him. Oh!" She arrests herself in consternation. "Now I *have* done it!"

He: "Done what?"

She: "Oh — nothing!"

He: "I don't understand. Do you mean to say that my friend Grinnidge's room is on the other side of the wall, and that you can hear him talk through the register?" She preserves the silence of abject terror. He stoops over the register, and calls down it. "Grinnidge! Hallo!"

Grinnidge: "Hallo, yourself!"

Ransom, to Miss Reed: "Sounds like the ghostly squeak of the phonograph." To Grinnidge: "What's the trouble?"

Grinnidge: "Smashed my pipe. Dozed

off and let it drop on this infernal register."

Ransom, turning from the register with impressive deliberation: "Miss Reed, may I ask *how* you came to know that his name was Gummidge, or Grimmidge, or whatever I called him?"

She: "Oh, dearest, I *can't* tell you! Or — yes, I had better." Impulsively: "I will judge you by myself. *I* could forgive *you* anything!"

He, doubtfully: "Oh, could you?"

She: "Everything! I had — I had better make a clean breast of it. Yes, I had. Though I don't like to. I — I listened!"

He: "Listened?"

She: "Through the register to — to — what — you — were saying before you — came in here." Her head droops.

He: "Then you heard everything?"

She: "Kill me, but don't look *so* at me! It was accidental at first — indeed it was; and then I recognized your voice; and then I knew you were talking about me; and I had so much at stake; and I did love you so dearly! You *will* forgive me, darling? It was n't as if I were listening with any bad motive."

He, taking her in his arms: "Forgive you? Of course I do. But you must change this room at once, Ethel; you see, you hear everything on the other side, too."

She: "Oh, not if you whisper on this. You could n't hear *us?*" At a dubious expression of his: "You *did n't* hear us? If you did, I can never forgive you!"

He: "It was accidental at first —

indeed it was; and then I recognized your voice; and then I knew you were talking about me; and I had so much at stake; and I did love you so dearly!"

She: "All that has nothing whatever to do with it. How much did you hear?"

He, with exemplary meekness: "Only what you were saying before Grinnidge came in. You did n't whisper then. I had to wait there for him while —"

She: "While you were giving your good resolutions a rest?"

He: "While I was giving my good resolutions a rest."

She: "And that accounts for your determination to humble yourself so?"

He: "It seemed perfectly providential that I should have known just what conditions you were going to exact of me."

She: "Oh, don't make light of it! I can tell you it 's a very serious matter."

He: "It was very serious for me when you did n't meet my self-abasement as you had led me to expect you would."

She: "Don't make fun! I 'm trying to think whether I can forgive you."

He, with insinuation: "Don't you believe you could think better if you put your head on my shoulder?"

She: "Nonsense! Then I should forgive you without thinking." After a season of reflection: "No, I *can't* forgive you. I never could forgive eavesdropping. It 's *too* low."

He, in astonishment: "Why, you did it yourself!"

She: "But you began it. Besides, it 's very different for a man. Women

are weak, poor, helpless creatures. They have to use finesse. But a man should be above it."

He: "You said you could forgive me anything."

She: "Ah, but I did n't know what you 'd been doing!"

He, with pensive resignation, and a feint of going: "Then I suppose it 's all over between us."

She, relenting: "If you could think of any reason *why* I should forgive you —"

He: "I can't."

She, after consideration: "Do you suppose Mr. Grumage, or Grimidge, heard too?"

He: "No; Grinnidge is a very high-principled fellow, and would n't listen; besides, he was n't there, you know."

She: "Well, then, I will forgive you on these grounds." He instantly catches her to his heart. "But these alone, remember."

He, rapturously: "Oh, on any!"

She, tenderly: "And you 'll always be devoted? And nice? And not try to provoke me? Or neglect me? Or anything?"

He: "Always! Never!"

She: "Oh, you dear, sweet, simple old thing — how I *do* love you!"

Grinnidge, who has been listening attentively to every word at the register at his side: "Ransom, if you don't want me to go stark mad, *shut the register!*"

Ransom, about to comply: "Oh, poor old man! I forgot it was open!"

Miss Reed, preventing him: "No! If

he has been vile enough to listen at a register, let him suffer. Come, sit down here, and I 'll tell you just when I began to care for you. It was long before the cow. Do you remember that first morning after you arrived — " She drags him close to the register, so that every word may tell upon the envious Grinnidge, on whose manifestations of acute despair, a rapid curtain descends.

University Press: John Wilson & Son, Cambridge.